

GROWING SEASON:

A Facilitator's Guide

to creating an

Educational Vegetable Gardening Program

in a

Marginalized Community

*Prepared by the **PHS Community Services Society**
with support from the **Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia***

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INTRODUCTION

In Canada, our lower-income and marginalized neighbourhoods face many unique challenges. There are the familiar factors, such as high unemployment rates, inadequate housing, crime, and substance abuse. These are often the focus for politicians, activists, residents and others who are trying to improve conditions in these communities. There are many traditional strategies to deal with these issues (e.g. better access to education, tougher penalties for criminals), as well as some more novel approaches (e.g. harm reduction programs, supportive housing developments). These efforts are aimed at tackling the root causes of marginalization, and breaking cycles of violence, poverty, and addiction.

There are, however, some subtler factors at play in Canada's poorest neighbourhoods. While they might not be considered "root causes", they nevertheless make it difficult to break out of poverty. Imagine, for example, that you had no teeth and no access to a dentist... no matter what sort of job training you received, you'd still have a harder time making a good impression in the interview! Or let's say you aced the interview, but have no fixed address or phone that your would-be employer could use to contact you. There are all sorts of these types of complications that make life more difficult for the individual living in poverty.

This guide will support the creation of a vegetable gardening program that will help deal with the following issues, which can contribute to and sustain marginalization:

- ***Idle hands:*** In neighbourhoods with high unemployment rates, there is often little to do with one's time. People can only read so many books or watch so much TV! Everyone needs to feel useful, and many people can benefit from involvement in community projects. Without such projects we see boredom, depression, and criminal behaviour on the rise.
- ***Limited access to naturalized and therapeutic spaces:*** Most humans are deprived of nature to some extent, with more and more of us living in cities. To compensate, we take walks to local parks, or travel to less urban environments. And if we can't get away, we have access to other therapeutic activities that we call hobbies, recreation, or private counsel. In poorer neighbourhoods, there tends to be a lack of access to all of the above.
- ***Compromised nutrition:*** In Canada, it is difficult to imagine that many people are at risk of starvation. With all of our food banks and other programs, people can generally receive adequate caloric intake to get them through the day. But malnutrition is still a huge problem, in that poorer Canadians have incredible difficulty accessing fresh and nutritious food. Not

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everyone can afford to shop at Whole Foods, and is very difficult for food banks to provide perishable food such as quality produce

What follows is not a prescription, but rather a handbook based on the experiences of one non-profit housing society that has been managing gardens with their residents for many years. In 2013, the PHS Community Services Society received a generous grant from the Real Estate Foundation of BC to pilot an educational vegetable gardening program for residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The purpose of this training program was to help alleviate all three of the issues mentioned above. When communities are granted access to vegetable gardens problems associated with idle hands, access to nature, and nutrition can be diminished. We hope that you can use this guide to achieve similar objectives in your neighbourhood!

Determining your goals

When embarking on this sort of project, the first thing to do is formalize your goals. It is easy enough to find a patch of soil (or create one) and begin planting seeds with people in the neighbourhood. But what are you ultimately trying to accomplish? Within the context of our idle-hands/nature/nutrition paradigm, there are many more specific agenda items on which that you can focus. Do you want program participants to become proficient horticulturalists, perhaps offering something akin to **job training**? If so, it would be worthwhile to offer some form of certification in partnership with a local university's agricultural faculty, a community college's horticultural department, or even an agricultural branch of the provincial or federal government.

Perhaps you want your program to be more **therapeutic** in nature, where expectations of gardening proficiency are not quite so high. Focus might be placed on individual participants' needs and abilities, and self-guided projects could be the order of the day. Outcomes here are often measured in terms of participants' attendance throughout the course of the program. Horticultural therapy is in fact a blossoming discipline, and so it would be worth your while to consult with professionals who practice in this field.

Our approach has decidedly been one of **community building**. While it contains elements of training and therapy, our project is focused on bringing people together where they wouldn't normally congregate, focused on a common cause that wouldn't otherwise exist. We essentially identified existing landscaped spaces, and

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asked ourselves whether they could be used as a point of coalescence for the residents we serve. We removed the ornamental plants in order to begin what we called an “educational” vegetable gardening program; educational in that it prepares residents to sustain the project in the future and to hopefully start similar projects elsewhere in the city.

Of course, your decisions around project goals will largely be informed by factors outside your own imagination and desires. You need to tailor programming to the needs and desires of participants, which we'll discuss in the next section. Physical geography and access to growing medium, sunlight, etc are also major considerations. Are you going to be gardening at a single central location, or multiple spaces? Either way, the program participants will benefit from having somewhere to hone their skills outside of class time. The project context is also important. Are you a social housing provider looking to serve your residents? Or are you a non-profit urban farm mandated to train unemployed individuals for work on your site?

Organization of this guide

This document is divided into three sections to help you get your program up and running. In section one, we'll consider the participants themselves... who are they, and what do they stand to gain from your program? What sort of content needs to be covered to address their needs and goals? Section two covers the macro-level organization: how the program is organized throughout the growing season. Section three deals with micro-level organization: how the program can be delivered on the scale of a single day.

I) THE PARTICIPANTS

Determining your programming needs goes hand-in-hand with determining the needs of the participants. The first step is figuring out who they are, and how you will connect with them. You need to **identify them** and speak with them early on in the season to assess their needs and goals. Ideally this would be done in January, so that you have time to design a program before the growing season starts. You will need to figure out how they will be **motivated** to attend the sessions on a regular basis, and how **their interests** can be sustained throughout the year. Knowing a bit about their situation (employment status, living situation, association with other gardens) will help you determine what opportunities they have to grow vegetables outside of “class”. Additionally, it helps to identify your potential **collaborators** (workshop facilitators, urban farmers, etc) ahead of time, for scheduling purposes.

Identifying program participants

You may already be familiar with the candidates for your program. In fact, your familiarity with them may be the reason you wanted to start such a program in the first place. In our case, we identified in our community a strong desire for involvement with vegetable gardening, based on the sheer number of visitors to our ½-acre urban farm site. We kept track of the most interested and frequent visitors (name and contact information), and were sure to call them when we started our program. Since we are a non-profit housing group, many of these folks actually live in the buildings that we manage.

If you are not already familiar with the individuals, you have probably identified a desire for vegetable gardening opportunities in the community as a whole. But how do you track down the most interested people? First, you need to decide **how many** participants you can handle for the year. This can be determined by several factors: Will you be hosting one group per week, or more than one? How many facilitators will you have, on the average day? Will any of your participants have physical and/or cognitive challenges that require special attention and extra time. In general, a limit of about 10 able-bodied participants per facilitator allows sufficient attention for each individual. Another reason for placing a limit is the accessibility of tools and garden space; you want each participant to have something to do during your sessions. If you'll be working with folks that require a little more time and attention, consider limiting group size to 5 individuals. This isn't to say that the entire program host only 5-10 people of the course of the year; you can have multiple sessions with different cohorts on a given day or week.

Once you've determined your numbers, you can approach several different groups to find interested participants. If your city has an **urban farming** scene, definitely speak to the directors or volunteer coordinators of these organizations. Urban farms always attract interest from the community, but often do not have the resources to train or otherwise work with everyone that expresses interest. Another key group is the **community garden**; these spaces usually have long waiting lists of people wanting to garden, and they may be able to connect you with people that have a strong interest in gardening. A third option is to check in with building managers and staff at local **social housing developments**. As mentioned above in the discussion around the "idle hands" phenomenon, boredom is a common frustration amongst individuals living in poverty; many building managers are approached by their residents every day with offers to do some landscaping or gardening around the building. These gardening enthusiasts are the ones who will likely benefit most from your program, and they are also likely to disseminate new horticultural knowledge around their community in the future.

Once you have a list of participants, keep their contact information in a safe place. Different people will be reachable in different ways; many may be avid social media or email users, others may only use the phone. In some cases, individuals may not use either, and you may have to rely on staff at the person's residence to help you communicate with them. It is a good idea to accept the fact that you will not be able to communicate with everyone in the same way.

Assessing participants' needs

When you first meet with the group, you'll need to assess where they are at in terms of their **interests and abilities**. Some may have a lot of gardening, farming or landscaping experience, and it may be worthwhile to ask these individuals to partner with some of the horticultural novices to facilitate learning. Many folks may not have any experience at all.

Perhaps more important than incoming skillsets is the **motivation** behind their interest in gardening. Assessing this will be a key determinant to program structure. If most of your participants simply want to get their hands dirty, then the program can be focused on the basics of plant cultivation, and on the logistical side of growing vegetables in the city (i.e. where can they acquire the materials they need, how can they find a place to grow some of their own vegetables, and what are the key activities during the growing season). Or you may find that your group

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desires more rigorous training, so that they might find employment with a local urban or rural farm. In this case, the program needs to include more advanced sessions, such as compost management, harvesting for market, and pest management. Regardless, your program will have to be designed such that motivation is maintained; if your content is too advanced or too novice for the majority of the group.

Below is a questionnaire that we distributed to help us gauge the type of interest among participants:

1. Do you visit community gardens or other types of people-powered growing spaces often? If so, what do you like best about visiting these spaces?
2. Is there anything that annoys you when you visit, volunteer, or work in these spaces?
3. What is one major thing you'd like to learn about growing vegetables in the city?
4. What kind of responsibilities would you be able to take on in the management of a communal vegetable garden space?
5. Have you ever received any kind of training or guidance in gardening? This could be formal, informal, or even gardening with an adult when you were younger.
6. What would you like to see happen with vegetables that are grown in your community or city? (e.g. they could be sold at markets, distributed to food banks and community kitchens, or taken home by the people that grow them)
7. How did you hear about this vegetable gardening program? (e.g. word of mouth, contacted by the people running the program, flyer)

Sometimes in more marginalized communities (or with any group of people for that matter), sustained motivation to attend this type of program depends on other things besides interest. You may find that some participants are discouraged from attending sessions for other reasons. These include lack of self-confidence, disagreements with other participants, financial insecurity, and others. To be sure, this is not a manual for solving everyone's socioeconomic problems, and you should anticipate a drop in attendance after the first few sessions. But we can employ a few tools to encourage participants to keep showing up each week; this will be discussed in section three.

Collaboration

Aside from program participants, other stakeholders would include any groups you will be collaborating with along the way. These can include food banks and community kitchens, where the produce you grow may find a home. It could include urban farms or community gardens, whose space you may gain access to in exchange for volunteer labour. And it could include other community groups or non-profits that have similar programmatic goals as yours.

Identification of these collaborators ahead of time is a good idea. You'll want to let them know what you're up and where you're going with your program, and discuss whether they might be interested in getting involved. Remember not to promise too much, especially in your first year. For example, do NOT promise a community kitchen that you'll be able to donate "X" amount of produce; rather, let folks know what your fundamental goals are, and that you'd be happy if both your organization and theirs could benefit simultaneously.

If there is a sizeable urban farm in your community, this may provide you with a great venue for program delivery. As opposed to a tiny patch of earth on a rooftop or in a courtyard, a larger farm setting will allow your group to spread out so that everyone can get their hands in the soil. And it will save money for both you and the farm: they get free labour and you don't have to purchase so many garden tools! As mentioned above, urban farms are not in a great position to coordinate volunteers, and they often struggle to get the day's work done with a limited labour force. As these enterprises pop up all over the world's cities, they are going to be looking for creative solutions to getting the job done. If you can coordinate schedules, and link your workshop content to their labour needs, the arrangement will be mutually beneficial. What the urban farm DOESN'T need is a whole lot of distraction and extra labour coordination on workdays, so try to be as self-contained as possible with your group. What you don't need is hours and hours of monotonous labour that doesn't link to your programming goals; be sure to be up front with urban farming collaborators about your project's desired outcomes.

There may be other non-profit organizations in your community with a similar mandate regarding food justice issues. If they are trying to do similar work (i.e. gardening programs), partnering with them is a must! Nobody wants to reinvent the wheel, and so sharing information and feedback with each other regarding your respective programs is of great benefit to both parties. Additionally, you may be able to team up for certain workshops, and gain access to more farm and garden

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sites. Sharing expertise in this domain is always helpful, as garden-based educational or therapeutic programming is still quite novel, and nobody has all the answers; it is still very much a developing field.

II) MACRO-LEVEL ORGANIZATION: THE YEAR AHEAD

Before hammering out the details of the individual workshops or lesson plans, you need to create your overview for the year. To do this, you need to incorporate the following factors into your plan (we'll discuss each of these in turn below):

- The start date, end date, frequency of workshops, and workshop lengths
- Crop phenology (i.e. when crops need to be planted and harvested)
- Site access and the needs of each site, garden, or farm

Program and workshop lengths

Determining when to start and stop your program is up to you. Most of the vegetable gardening programs we're aware of take place during the active growing season (i.e. when the crops themselves are biologically active). This gives participants a fairly comprehensive view of what it takes to grow food in their bioregion. Plus, the growing season is also generally a favourable time of year to be outside (i.e. everyone will be more physically comfortable). Depending on the needs of your participants, however, you may want to lengthen or shorten this schedule. If they have expressed interest in finding work on rural or urban farms, they will benefit from learning about the going-on in the off-season (e.g. cover cropping, winter crop protection, greenhouse prep, etc). If your program is more therapeutic in nature, then waiting until it's a little warmer outside probably makes more sense (although this comes at the expense of a less comprehensive workshop schedule).

Depending on your group, you may decide to run workshops every week or every other week. Any more frequently and you will not leave yourself very much time for things besides workshop facilitation (all the other parts of your job, e.g. planning, collecting feedback, meeting with collaborators/stakeholders, raising funds). A once-per-week timetable is probably the most ideal, because it is easy for participants to remember to show up; telling people to arrive "every Tuesday at 10am" is better than "on the 3rd and the 17th". When choosing the day of the week, try not to pick "cheque day" or "welfare day" (the day when many of your participants will need to pick up their welfare cheques and hence not be present for your workshops). Avoiding the day after cheque day is probably a good idea as well! If cheque day is on the last Wednesday of every month, then Mondays or Tuesdays would be perfect for you workshop day.

In terms of workshop length, we will discuss this more in section three. As a general rule, you don't want to have any activity lasting more than an hour. For example,

you should definitely not be delivering a lesson to your participants for more than an hour, and you will probably find that setting them to work for an hour is a good amount of time before the distractions of the day kick in.

Crop phenology

The physical/environmental needs of different vegetables will largely dictate the layout of any program, no matter what your participants' interests. You'll definitely want to source or create a comprehensive planting/harvesting chart for your region. At the very least, this chart should list the times at which each vegetable should be started/sown. For an example, check out the West Coast Seeds calendar for the Lower Mainland in British Columbia:

<http://www.westcoastseeds.com/content/Planting-Reference-Charts/>

Other valuable information, for each crop species, may include:

- Time to maturity (how long it needs before harvest)
- Solar, water, temperature, and nutrient demands
- Whether it can be started inside (or in a greenhouse)
- Rooting depth

When you have all of this information in front of you, it is helpful to have a look back at your participants' needs and desired learning outcomes. You will start to find some appropriate times of year to run a workshop on specific topics. For example, if your group wants to learn how to start vegetables seedlings indoors, you may find that tomatoes can be started inside several weeks before they are transplanted outdoors (and can thus serve as a great case study for this learning outcome).

What you'll want to do is create a spreadsheet that lists all the workshop dates from Spring to Autumn, and begin "filling in the blanks" with the themes of your workshops. You'll find that, at first, it's quite easy to find times to run all sorts of workshops on seasonally appropriate dates. For example, an indoor planting workshop will fit anywhere early in the season, a pest management workshop will fit anywhere in the summer, and a harvesting workshop can be held in the fall. As you fill in each week, however, certain workshops will need to be shuffled around to make room. You may wish to host workshops on such topics as composting, greenhouse maintenance, plant nutrition, human nutrition, weed identification, etc. There will be room for all of these, but again some shuffling may be in order! A sample schedule is provided below to show you what we mean:

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WEEK 1 Mar 1-5
Theory: Farm Intro & History
Practical: Farm tour, Fruit trees, Pruning

WEEK 2 Mar 8-12 I
Theory: How to Start a Garden, Record Keeping
Practical: Plot Assignment, Perennials, Cloches

WEEK 3 Mar 15-19
Theory: Seed Sowing & Plant Propagation
Practical: Seed Sowing

WEEK 4 Mar 22-26
Theory: Sense of place, Phenology
Practical: Tools

WEEK 5 Mar 29- Apr 1
Theory: Cultivation
Practical: Digging

WEEK 6 Apr 6-9
Theory: Compost
Practical: Compost making

WEEK 7 Apr 12-16
Theory: Intercropping & Rotation
Practical: Felting

WEEK 8 Apr 19-23
Theory: Plant nutrition & deficiency indicators
Practical: Chicken Tractor

WEEK 9 Apr 26-30
Theory: 1st quarter review
Practical: Caring for plants in greenhouses

WEEK 10 May 3-7
Evaluation, Break

WEEK 11 May 10-14
Theory: Soil
Practical: Corn planting

WEEK 12 May 17-21
Theory: Irrigation
Practical: Watering systems

WEEK 13 May 24-28
Theory: Weeds & Pests
Practical: Weeding

WEEK 14 May 31-June 4
Theory: Mulches & Green manures
Practical: Harvesting & Market preparation

WEEK 15 June 7-11
Theory: Marketing
Practical: CSA begins

WEEK 16 June 14-18
Theory: Livestock
Practical: Planting out

WEEK 17 June 21-25
Theory: Seed Saving
Practical: Soil textural analysis

WEEK 18 June 28-July 2
Theory: 2nd quarter review
Practical: Evaluation

WEEK 19 July 5-9
TERM BREAK

WEEK 20 July 12-16
Theory: Year-round cropping

WEEK 21 July 19-23
Theory: Greenhouses
Practical: Solar Mapping

WEEK 22 Jul 26-30
Theory: Hay Making & Machinery
Practical: Soil analysis review

WEEK 23 Aug 2-6
Theory: Cosmic Influences
Practical: Canning

WEEK 24 Aug 9-13
Theory: Taxonomy

WEEK 25 Aug 16-20
Theory: Schools of Gardening
Practical: Drying the harvest

WEEK 26 Aug 22-27
Theory: Land Access
Practical: Seed-saving

WEEK 27 Aug 30-Sept 3
Evaluation, Break

WEEK 28 Sept 7-10
Theory: Apple Propagation
Practical: Potato Harvest

WEEK 29 Sept 13-17
Theory: ACTIVITY WEEK
Practical: Harvest Festival

WEEK 30 Sept 20-24
Theory: Composting toilets
Practical: Fruit harvest

WEEK 31 Sept 27-Oct 1
Theory: World Food Crises
Practical: Mulch collection

WEEK 32 Oct 4-8
Theory: Root cellaring
Practical: Compost building

WEEK 33 Oct 11-15
Theory: Thanksgiving, Land Ethics
Practical: Put your plot to bed

WEEK 34 Oct 18-22
Theory: Final review & Evaluation
Practical: Farmhouse cleanup

The site(s)

Depending on your organization's assets, you may already have access to outdoor space, perhaps even garden space. Incorporating the building of garden beds and soil building into your program would be a great way to kick things off in the early spring, if need be. But if you don't have such space, you'll want to coordinate with your partner urban farms and/or community gardens well ahead of time. This is to ensure site access and timetable compatibility between your organization and theirs. If you're partnered with an urban farm, meet with them in the wintertime to go over their needs for the upcoming growing season. Along with crop phenology and the needs of your participants, this information will feed into your workshop scheduling as outlined in the preceding section.

Having more than one location for your group to visit will allow them to gain a better understanding of the universality of certain horticultural principles. At the same time, however, they'll also get to experience a greater diversity of challenges, as each site will be burdened and blessed with its own sets of agrological problems and opportunities. Additionally, to break up the pattern of weekly workshops, it is advisable to take some field trips! Taking your group out to a more rural farm setting (for example) will not only expose them to whole new lines of agricultural inquiry, it may serve to enhance the group's social dynamic via shared experiences. And it's always nice to get out of the city, especially when individuals living with poverty have so few opportunities to do so.

III) MICRO-LEVEL ORGANIZATION: THE DAY AHEAD

By now you have put together your schedule for the year, have a group of interested workshop participants, and have developed partnerships with some like-minded collaborators. It is time to figure out exactly what you'll be doing during the workshops themselves. What follows is, again, not a prescription, but rather an overview of our experiences and some guiding principles that follow from them. We found it immensely helpful to break each day into three distinct components: ***Team building, Theory, and Practicum.***

Team building

One thing to always keep in mind is that people thrive when they are ***making connections***. This can mean connection with their environment, where they get to interact with and learn about plants, animals, and their physical surroundings in a meaningful way. But it also means connection with their fellow humans. Many people living in marginalized neighbourhoods form extremely tight bonds with some of their neighbours. On the flip side, some individuals harbour feelings of resentment towards others. This can be the result of feuds with specific neighbours, or it can take the form of generally aggressive or antisocial behaviour learned through years of tough living conditions. Either way, you can't expect to run a harmonious vegetable gardening program without working through some of these hard feelings and doing some team building.

The first step is to make sure everyone ***learns and uses one another's names***. This may seem obvious, but we have found that our participants are often resistant to calling people by their preferred name. This may be because some folks are more comfortable communicating with their fellow participants through the facilitator, or because calling someone by name feels too familiar to them. Really focusing on remedying this can help break down psychological barriers to open communication with one another. Just imagine difference you'd feel if someone started calling you by your first name rather than "hey you"! One exercise we employed was to go around in a circle stating our names and an alliterate vegetable or fruit that we like. For example, "my name is Bonnie and I like berries" or "I'm Steve and strawberries are my favourite fruit". Each successive person in the circle would have to say "Hi Bonnie who likes berries, and Steve who likes strawberries, [and so on]..." before introducing themselves. This activity would be repeated at the start of each workshop until everyone was using each others' names.

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After the name-learning exercises, the next step would be to familiarize everyone with the garden/farm space, such that they would be comfortable in it and even start to take on some sense of stewardship. This was achieved in two fundamental ways. The first was to run some scavenger-hunt-like activities, where people were given either clues or samples of crops/materials and asked to hunt them down on the site. This clue/sample could be a piece of paper that reads, “this tool helps us turn the compost”, or a leaf from a kale plant, or anything else that would have people exploring the farm. The second way to encourage stewardship was to have morning site cleanups; participants would spend five minutes picking up litter, safely disposing of any hazardous material found on site (such as used syringes and condoms), and generally sweeping up any debris that was lying around.

Once people have become comfortable with one another and the site(s), the introductory morning activities can start to be led by the participants themselves. This helps to nurture a sense of leadership, something that we hope the participants will carry over to their daily lives. Remember, the goals of this sort of program are not limited to agricultural know-how; we want people to become strong forces of positive change in their communities. These morning activities can take the form of games that the participants have invented or learned elsewhere. Or, they can be more personal, such as storytelling or discussing what they've been up to over the past week. Sometimes a participant will bring their ideas for the farm/garden to the table for an open discussion.

Theory

As mentioned in the previous section, the work that is done in a garden or farm setting will largely be dictated by the season and the needs of the farm itself. This forms the basis of the annual schedule that you have made for your program. But what needs to be linked to this work are the theoretical underpinnings of small-scale agriculture. The detail that you go into, and the range of topics, should be defined by your initial consultations with your participants back in the winter.

We have found that the educational (theory) component is best delivered after the morning's team building exercises, because participants will have moved away from the other distractions of the day and mentally entered into farm-mode! If your budget permits, you might consider ordering a round of coffee and muffins for the group. This will help to keep people grounded and focused on subject at hand.

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An example will help you understand how to connect theory to practice. Let's say that the farm or garden site is in the midst of preparing some soil for planting. The practicum that will come later in the afternoon will involve lots of double-digging and turning the soil. This would be a good day to pencil in some soil science for the theory component, as having this sort of understanding will make the work to come more meaningful. In your lesson, you can discuss such things as soil texture, organic matter, and various techniques used for tilling the earth. If you want, you may take a more narrative approach, explaining some of the history behind modern soil tilling, such as the advent of the plow, industrial-scale tilling, and modern no-till alternative approaches. This kind of discussion will bring the day's activities and lessons into context for the participants. Throughout your program, you'll want to draw out the larger implications of what you're all doing at this site... that is, trying to look at novel and sustainable ways of producing food.

In terms of workshop delivery, it's best to avoid a 100% lecture format. Try to involve your participants as much as possible in the discussion of the subject material. For example, you may be delivering a session on pest management. Rather than monotonously cataloging various garden pests and treatment options, invite your participants to brainstorm on this subject. Have them take turns listing the pests they've noticed; you help with ID if they don't know the species' names. Then the group can try to come up with creative solutions for control or eradication. You'll find that this type of approach holds the group's attention better than a monologue delivered by one person. And again, this helps build leadership qualities and encourages participatory behaviours.

Practicum

This is where your participants get to apply what they've learned, while at the same time contribute to their community in a positive way. Ideally, the activities they engage in at this point should be connected to the theory portion of the workshop, and should be hosted immediately afterwards. You'll want to pick activities that can be accomplished by the whole group at once (i.e. you'll have enough tools and materials for everyone to get involved), in a timely fashion. As mentioned previously, try to limit your practicum activities to a maximum of one hour. Any longer and participants might start to feel like free labour! In fact, if your project finances allow, consider offering a small honorarium for any practicum activities that contribute to farm or garden operations. This will help motivate people to continue to attend your sessions.

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Keeping participants interested in both the theory and practicum activities is of paramount importance. We've already discussed how to keep them engaged in the theory section, but what about the practicum?

The biggest challenge you're likely to come up against is the fact that each individual will have different capacities for the practicum work. The participants you'll likely encounter will have different physical and intellectual abilities. The best way to deal with this is to try to find variations in the practicum activities such that each individual can be accommodated. For example, if someone has limited mobility, they could fulfill a role as record-keeper for the project. Record keeping is an essential activity in the farming world (e.g. planting dates), but is something that you as a program facilitator would want to do regardless. You'll use these notes when refining your annual program plan, or reporting to your funders/employers, or creating participant evaluation forms. On the other hand, you may recruit someone to help with garden planning if they display a high degree of aptitude for that sort of thing (e.g. selecting varieties, making harvest calculations and planning decisions).

Another issue is problematic behaviour, which is especially likely if you are running a project in a neighbourhood plagued by mental health issues. Disputes and feuds can come up between participants. They may be long-standing disputes (if they already knew one another before the program began), in which case you may have to ask the more aggressive participant to step away from the program. However this is where offering the program on multiple days comes in handy! Don't these feuds take up too much your time; it is not your job to resolve everyone's differences. Separate the individuals into different weekdays, or ask the aggressor to come back next year. If the feud is brand new, try to figure out how it came about. It may be that you've inadvertently given someone an opportunity for someone to be aggressive or bossy; try to find a different role in the project practicum for this individual.

Also associated with problematic behaviour, be sure to establish a zero tolerance drug and alcohol policy right off the bat. While some folks may have legitimate reasons (e.g. medicinal marijuana), it is a slippery slope to allow any illicit substances during program hours.

To summarize, we have included a sample plan for one day's worth of workshop activities below:

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Tuesday March 17th, 2013

10am-10:30am

Meet group and clean the site for 5 minutes. Play the name game until everyone has names memorized.
Coffee and muffin delivery.

10:30am-11:30am

Theory: **Greenhouse Management**

Topics: passive vs. active greenhouses, bottom heating, artificial lighting, matching environmental conditions (light, temperature, humidity), starting seedlings in trays, identifying and treating damping-off disease.

11:30am-12:30pm

Practicum: **Starting pepper seeds**

Set up stations for each individual to plant a different variety of pepper
Assign someone to keep record of planting date, varieties, number of plants, environmental conditions

CONCLUSION

We sincerely hope that you find this guide useful in the creation of vegetable gardening program in your community. We know from experience that such programs are therapeutic for individuals and neighbourhoods, and provide an outlet for folks to unleash their energy in a positive way. We've seen participants from such programs make connections in their community and go on to get involved in other garden-related programs. Many of our "trainees" are now actively engaged in garden management at their place of residence. The effects of your program will ripple throughout the neighbourhood for years to come!